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Election Loss Possible, Memo Warns the GOP

The press and the pollsters have all but reelected President Reagan. Yet neither presidential candidate has a do-or-die following large enough to win the election. The outcome will be determined by the swing vote—the independents who are loyal to neither Reagan nor Walter F. Mondale.

This middle vote, now leaning heavily toward Reagan, can be changed overnight by a shift in the political winds. And a confidential memo circulating inside the White House warns that the Republicans could blow it.

The memo was written by Max Hugel, a deputy director of the 1980 Reagan campaign, now a senior adviser.

"This election is far from a push-over," he warns. "No matter what the polls say now, as it gets closer to Election Day, the electorate will narrow. It is very possible we could lose."

Hugel doesn't trust the polls. "The experts tell me that the polls can be interpreted and analyzed differently depending on how the questions are asked and reported . . .," he says. "Depending on

one's motive, they can be reported for the purpose of lulling the Reagan supporters into complacency and inactivity."

Here are the concerns raised in the memo:

1. In 1980, Reagan "had President Carter to run against." Carter was an unpopular president on the defensive. In 1984, Reagan faces a more formidable ticket, and the Democrats are on the attack—"with extreme intensity," the memo adds.

2. In 1980, many key electoral states were controlled by Republican governors, with strong state organizations. In 1984, some of these states now have Democratic governors.

3. In 1980, the Democratic special-interest blocs—unions, teachers, minorities, feminists, etc.—were less than enthusiastic about Carter. Some even gave Reagan "passive approval."

But in 1984, these groups are fired up against Reagan.

4. In 1980, the foreign-policy spotlight was focused on the Iranian hostage crisis, a Carter fiasco. In 1984, the spotlight is on Central America, Lebanon and the Persian Gulf, with Reagan on the defensive.

5. In 1980, the conservatives were wild about Reagan. In 1984, "they don't have the same intensity for getting President Reagan reelected," the memo notes.

6. In 1980, Reagan hammered at

the Democratic deficit and promised a balanced budget. In 1984, he is held accountable for a budget that is more out of balance than ever.

Added to all this, the memo concludes, the Democrats "are financially healed; they have the fight and drive necessary to put on a strong campaign; they are better organized."